

Conference Paper

Culture in Transition: Problems of Thinking and Speech Development

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Abstract

The authors consider this psychological and pedagogical research to be relevant as it advances the discussion of Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria's cultural-historical theory of higher psychological functions and seeks to understand environment as a source of psychological development rather than as a condition for it. The interiorization of contemporary cultural phenomena bears the signs of fragmentary, mosaic thinking that makes it difficult to nurture the ability to analyze and identify cause-and-effect relationships. A superficial approach to the ever-expanding volume of knowledge prevents one from comprehending concepts, which has a negative impact on the development of consciousness, cognitive and affective functions, activity, verbal and non-verbal communication, and of the conceptual structure of the world and self-reflection on one's place in the world. Speech enriches and stimulates thinking, thus driving the educational process toward a search for ways of integrating innovative tools and methods of engaging learners in adequate types of learning activities in the 'the zone of proximal development'. The author's many years of experience confirms the psychological and pedagogical effectiveness of the acquisition of meta-disciplinary content in philosophical propaedeutic starting from primary school. Meta-disciplinarity as a universal integratory phenomenon encompasses meta-knowledge, meta-tools, meta-skills, and meta-action that are connected with mental activity in super-subject knowledge acquisition by contrast with subject knowledge acquisition. Philosophical knowledge as meta-knowledge has a high degree of generalization and facilitates a holistic view of the world and the human's place in it that is registered in the speech of the linguistic persona. The latter grows from being 'knowledgeable' to being a 'thinking' and 'creating' one. The theoretical and practical novelty of the study is that explores the concept of self-care in education.

Keywords: digital civilization, changing society, culture, linguistic persona, higher psychological functions, thinking and speech, mosaic thinking, 'self-care'

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...the effects of an offence of the body are instantly noticeable. But the evil of word crimes we cannot observe.

—Leo Tolstoy

1. Introduction

Dynamic socio-cultural transformations that occurred in the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century brought about civilization phenomena that increase the potential and risks to the development of society, culture and personality. That shows directly and indirectly in thinking and speech as new concepts have emerged, such as 'digital civilization', 'digital century', 'digital generation', 'digital childhood', 'digital security', 'information addition'. The concepts have become part of scientific and everyday discourse and are used at various level of education. The challenges of the new century that stem from the increasingly fast-paced renewal and spread of knowledge and high technology call for special psychological and pedagogical research into the theory and practice of the formation and development of personality that is related to language (first or second one) and speech value-wise and semantically.

Cultural and historical conditions determine the process and result of the development of a linguistic persona with mosaic thinking that hampers the acquisition of analytical skills and the ability to identify cause-and-effect relationships. A superficial approach to the ever expanding volume of knowledge prevents one from comprehending concepts and has a negative impact on the development of consciousness, cognitive and affective functions, activity, verbal and non-verbal communication, and of the conceptual structure of the world in general and self-reflection on one's place in the world. Without rejecting this change in the cognitive style of thinking, we will not stick to its negative connotation only and label it as fragmentary, discretionary and mosaic thinking. Psychological and pedagogical studies must take into account its benefits, too. These include the speed of information processing and its growing volumes. This calls for an ability to select relevant information, to mine it quickly and to combine its growing variety with actions. Finally, dialogue at various levels of sociality indicates the democratic nature of society and of the education system. The aforementioned characteristics of mosaic thinking do not address the issues of growing hyperactivity, distracted attention, the inability to focus [7, 10]. In such a situation the ability to analyze and synthesize information does not develop, hence

the inadequate understanding (if at all) of classic fiction books and scholarly texts. Knowledge expands, but lacks depth.

This makes it necessary to train the ability to understand the benefits and drawbacks and the potential and risks of mosaic thinking, to use it as an innovative cognitive tool in order to improve one's own thinking and speech. We believe that the aforementioned innovations set a research trend in the humanistic educational paradigm. At the core of it is the individual mastering universal learning activities at school and cultural, general professional and job-specific competencies at university. This guides the researcher toward searching for theoretical and methodological justification for the development of thinking and speech in a changing personality in a changing world.

2. Methodology

We build upon the methodological premises of Lev Vygotsky's and Alexander Luria's cultural-historical theory of higher psychological functions and their followers in Russia and abroad.

Luria wrote: "Man is a social creature, and socio-cultural conditions profoundly change him, developing numerous new behavioral forms and devices. The careful study of those distinctive traits is a specific task for psychological science" [2, p. 204].

This statement outlines trends in the study of the changing personality at any age in the changing world: (1) to identify the specific traits of personality as a social creature that faces the need to adapt and self-identify; (2) to analyze and synthesize socio-cultural conditions of environment, including the educational one; (3) to investigate what conditions transform personality and how it happens; (4) identify new behavioral forms and devices in thinking and speech that are starting 'to occupy the commanding heights'. As the psychologist put it, 'speech occupies the commanding heights and becomes the most commonly used cultural device, while enriching and stimulating thinking; and the child's psyche acquires a new structure' [2, p. 196].

Addressing the problems listed earlier, we shall proceed from the fundamental thesis that environment is not a *condition for*, but a *source of* a person's psychological development. In a situation of instability and uncertainty, environment influences the formation of consciousness and self-identity and boosts the activity of the language speaker and culture bearer. This brings to the forefront the issues of studying personality and identifying its traits and self-reflection in the phenomenon of the acquisition and creation of cultural values that are associated with the ability to code ideas in a semiotic form and express them orally and in writing.

By separating the concepts of 'language' and 'speech', we emphasize that speech as 'cultural device' (A. Luria) impacts the development of thinking, psyche as a whole and its structure through vocabulary, and grammar and stylistic forms. One speaks as he or she thinks, and thinks as he or she speaks, in other words, 'we see the world through language' (D. Davidson) and 'express our attitude to the world' through language (M. Bakhtin). Language mediates, preserves and channels cultural tradition and serves as an indicator of one's identity in the space of communicative discourse forming a universal spiritual gestalt in society. The fact that every person makes a long and hard 'journey to language' should become a revelation at the early stages of education and immediately help one embrace his/her value as linguistic persona ('the essence of man rests in language', 'language is the house of being' –M. Heidegger). This brings to light the psychological and pedagogical problem of perceiving language and speech as axiological categories, of embracing their values and motivation for making the 'journey to language'. In our opinion, making a way ahead on this long and hard road is linked to psychodidactics that implements Vygotsky's idea of learning taking the leading role in personality development when it precedes development rather than 'lags behind it'. This points to a link between psyche and society and provides an answer to the question of psychological mechanism: the developmental effect of learning is related to the proactive learner. This means that assignments need to be difficult, but doable and that they need to lie outside the 'zone of actual development' (something the learner can master on his or her own), but stay within the 'zone of proximal development' (where new knowledge can be mastered in cooperation with a more knowledgeable person). We shall extrapolate these conclusions to all age groups of learners and juxtapose them with the main premise of cooperative pedagogy, in which the teacher (instructor) facilitates the development of the learner's thinking and speech in a situation of success. The result is achieved through efforts taken by the person himself provided that the trainee is not a passive consumer of necessary information and knowledge. The latter case is typical of reproductive learning that forms a reproductive type of personality that is not ready and not able to produce creative solutions. The competency of teachers could be illustrated with the following metaphor used by Vygotsky:

If the gardener decides only to evaluate the matured or harvested fruits of the apple tree, he cannot determine the state of his orchard. Maturing trees must also be taken into consideration. The psychologist must not limit his analysis to functions that have matured. He must consider those that are in the process of maturing. If he is to fully evaluate the state of the

child's development, the psychologist must consider not only the actual level of development but the zone of proximal development. How can this be accomplished? [1, vol. 2, pp. 246–247].

Vygotsky daringly raised the question about the role of learning in the development and maturation of functions that are triggered by instruction. He was convinced that the most complex dynamic relationships emerged between the processes of development and instruction and that learning outcomes could be seen not only 'right here and right now', but have distal consequences because they move ahead of development, 'pushing it further and eliciting new formations'. The reality of school and university instruction over the past decades have provided the validity of Vygotsky's hypothesis, especially when self-regulated learning and independent study become the core didactic element. Through it, the learner exercises his or her ability to regulate their activities and balance them against perceived motives, goals, tasks and results being achieved. The chances of success in self-regulated learning in a situation when various sources of information are accessible at any time and at any place boost the ability to master universal educational actions at school, and universal cultural competencies, general professional competencies and job-related competences at university. Developmental education is aimed at facilitating the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, but even more so at teaching the *modus operandi*, the ability to design, construct and manage one's learning. Such an approach to instruction enables every learner to make their contribution to the formulation of goals and objectives of knowledge acquisition, to have a say on the selection of content and didactic technologies (forms, methods and means of instruction, self-assessment, assessment of results). The psychological and didactic scenario of success in learning is based on the general genetic law of the development of mental functions that was compiled by Vygotsky: there are *two planes* at which higher mental functions appear two planes, first – social as an interpsychic category, then – psychological as an intrapsychic category where the inner way of thinking is manifested [1, vol. 2, p. 145]. This results in a structural change in the personality as learning activity positively impacts 'those mental and social changes which first appear at a given age level and which mainly and basically determine the consciousness of the child, his relation to the environment, his internal and external life, the whole course of his development during the given period' [1, vol. 4, p. 248].

In this context, it is worth pointing to the theoretical and practical novelty of establishing theoretical and methodological foundations for the study of the changing personality in a changing world. Paul-Michel Foucault revived the classic philosophical

idea 'of the care of the self' put forth by Socrates and Plato. The idea was then picked up by Russian scholars E.Z. Bakhtiyarova, N.M. Gursky, G.I. Petrova, S.A. Smirnov, S.S. Khoruzhy, A.O. Cherepova, N.A. Churkina, etc. [3]. The modern man has found itself in a dual situation, Petrova writes: "education constructs the man, but education itself is influenced by factors that construct it... This brings about a question: Does he have any chance for self-development through self-construction? How active is he in his development?" [5, p. 131]. We can find an answer in the timely development of self-reflection, 'thinking about one's thinking' in order to realize one's place in society culture and education. This helps every person to understand oneself and others through analysis of one's thinking and speech. One of the successful practices of the 'care of the self' is one's self-definition. It becomes particularly relevant to study the gender aspect of the 'care of the self' and investigate the adaptation practices of masculine, feminine and androgenic mentality free from discriminatory influence (N.A. Churkina).

3. Results

In an attempt to answer Vygotsky's question as to 'how can this be accomplished', we resort to philosophical propaedeutic, which we view in relation with a unique phenomenon in the spiritual life of humanity – 'the eternal questions' that are implied to have no definitive answer. Every new generation asks new questions or rephrase the old ones and tries to answer them. Defining philosophical thinking as free thinking of a free person, we develop its key features from early childhood: it is subjective; it is personalized; it reflects essential personalized understanding of a man's vital problems. One's philosophical and moral convictions, existential experience that implements one's system of values bring to light the substantive and general approach to problem analysis. These parameters determine the subject, the bipolar nature, antinomy and reflection of philosophical analysis that combines the rational and emotional sides of thinking, the use of logical and transcendent methods of thinking, and the recognition of truth and faith. These are the goals, the process and outcomes of the development of heuristic thinking.

Creating conditions for a search of convincing arguments and evidence, dialogue is the best way of developing philosophical thinking that is essentially dialectic inasmuch as it is necessary for self-reflection and search for oneself: starting from the definition of concepts, genesis and generalization hierarchy. Dialogue supports the process of self-organization through self-development, self-motion. Philosophical thinking that focuses on singling out the meaningful from the endless variety of natural, social and

cultural phenomena is reflexive, holistic and critical. Using the Socratic and hermeneutic methods in instruction take these properties even further. To do that, we use the algorithms within the methods outlined in [4, pp. 271, 335] that exercise the main property of philosophical thinking – that of asking questions, which is typical of children (for example, there is spirit and matter; where is matter? Who controls nature and people? Can cruelty be good? Where, how and when do conscience and shame occur in man? The eternal questions and a search for answers to them do not rule out being doubtful, so it is the questions that are of value as they expand the scope of answers and stimulate imagination.

Returning to the problem of advanced ‘digital’ childhood, it has to be noted that the utilization of the methods and practice of developmental education can be traced in personal development indicators and the emergence of such age-specific new formations as reflection, trust, friendliness, acceptance of others, respectful attitude to others, empathy, identity, tolerance, cognitive-based motivation, self-regulation, independence, and responsibility. The development of such qualities is facilitated by instructional environments in which learning combines the learner’s immediate experience with systemic thinking, rational and intuitive processes. In other words, this instructional approach is integrative and promotes the generation of new ideas, hypotheses and cause-effect relationships, the juxtaposition of theoretical and practical knowledge, a quest for creative solutions in order to reach an optimum result. An advantage of the integrative type of thinking for learning is that it promotes a holistic outlook on the world and the comprehension of ontological relations, phenomena, processes and facts that back the continuity of the world. In fact, we are talking about meta-disciplinarity as a universal integratory phenomenon that encompasses meta-knowledge, meta-means, meta-skills, meta-activity that are associated with mental and action processes in supra-subject cognition as opposed to subject cognition. The author’s many years of experience confirms that supra-subject problem-based learning and real-life situations require a search for solutions that employs universal actions. Learners of any age thus acquire philosophical thinking experience [4, 6, 9, 11].

Philosophical knowledge as meta-knowledge with a high degree of generalization void of subject opens the way to a holistic vision of the world and the man’s place in it and assists the transition from knower to thinker and creator outside the frameworks of a specific subject. Meta-activity as a universal way of living of any learning person is determined by the level of mastery of meta-knowledge and meta-means, which shows in the character and the level of personality development at any age. At the

core of it is meta-knowledge, or knowledge about knowledge, that is linked to the understanding of the structure of language and ways of mastering it.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the authors of educational standards are trying to substantiate meta-disciplinarity in terms of developmental learning. It is argued that the meta-disciplinary approach could help address the task of teaching universal learning activities to school pupils by developing their cognitive, emotive, communicative, activity, moral and reflexive traits. Thinking that is enriched with adequate content through active cognitive activity based on concept-centered monologues and dialogues cannot be overestimated. In such a didactic situation, the idea and the word act together, illustrating Vygotsky's statement that "a word is a microcosm of human consciousness." [1, p. 361]

In our empirical study of 153 university students in the Urals pursuing teaching careers were asked to assess their prospects of professional fulfillment with regard to objectively established professional standards. The study revealed three levels of self-assessed professional loyalty – low (16 subjects, or 10.4%), medium (76 subjects, 49.6%) and high (61 subjects, 39.8%).

The obtained data were compared to the results of a survey of 81 teaching practitioners and students that was conducted at Ural Federal University (14 fourth-year bachelor's students; 40 first-year master's students at the faculties of philology and history; and 28 teachers at Yekaterinburg school of arts No 12).

The analysis showed the concept of 'the care of the self' is viewed as one's own business by 31 subjects; 27 subjects described it as the result of proper self-cultivation; and 22 considered it to be the result of deliberate education. No significant discrepancies were found between the groups of students and teaching professionals, and the groups consisting of bachelor degree students and master's students.

Of the 81 surveyed individuals, 37 said 'the care of the self' begins with self-criticism, 25 said it begins with 'questioning oneself', and 19 said it begins with 'making oneself'.

4. Discussion

The question of meta-disciplinarity as the cure of education in today's world that is filled with meaningful symbols is answered through the understanding of the world and one's place in it in terms of the concept of 'meaning' that reveals a fairly complete picture of the knowable. As part of fundamental knowledge acquisition, meanings as the focal points and symbols are studied through dialogue in order to achieve educational outcomes that are reflected in individual thinking and speech. Speaking

of the phenomenon of the 'care of the self' in this context, we would like to note that the author's experience of communicating with students at university indicates that the most common understanding of the 'care of the self' is rooted in the traditions of the life in Russia. The concept is considered to bear negative connotations and is associated with selfishness, neglect for others, the pursuit of one's own wellbeing at the expense of others. One could regret gaps in education that overlooked this problem that was branded in philosophy as an ancient practice. 'The care of the self' in today's situation of broader freedom and humanization brings to the forefront the issue of integrative thinking in the course of making an existential choice of the self. This idea, which is new to the theory and practice of Russian science, calls for the development of a psychological and pedagogical concept and ways of its implementation in education.

5. Conclusions

All the aforementioned raises a number of questions. First of all, there is a question of school teachers and university instructors' being proficient in the developmental education methodology and their competence in applying it in instruction. Another issue is timely comprehension diagnosis and the design of assessment and measuring materials for appropriate adjustments. A burning problem is the nurture of positive cognitive motivation in learners in a situation of success. This is feasible if the didactic process, including the virtual educational environment, is customized and personal learning trajectories are constructed. Finally, it is necessary to develop reflexive culture in learners through appropriate learning arrangements that would facilitate a transition from the external dialogue to inner dialogue, and from external assessment to self-assessment, to 'responsibility for the word' (L.N. Tolstoy) [8] and responsibility for speech. Such an attitude is anthropologically commensurate, while irresponsible attitude is anthropological disproportionate if it uses invective that devalues interpersonal relationships, the productivity of existential needs and self-actualization and respectable fulfillment in human-centered values.

This reveals the productivity of the phenomenon of the 'care of the self' as a necessary quality of the personality that is driven by the intention to achieve self-actualization, self-development, and self-fulfillment and realize and make use of one's potential, natural talents and possessed attributes, something that is achievable and indicative of the intentions and capacities for such fulfillment as well as actual accomplishments.

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